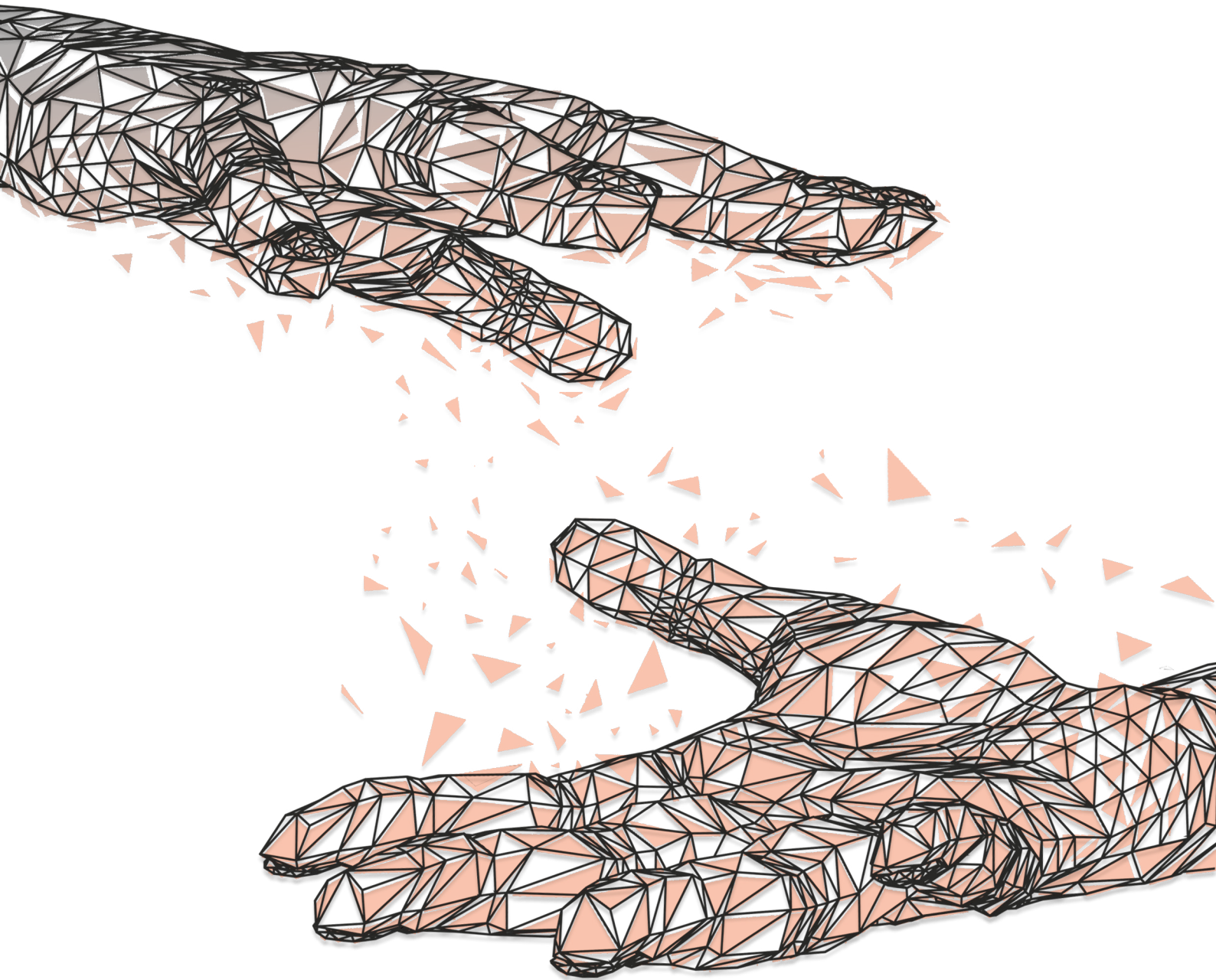


COUNSELLING PRACTITIONER BEGINNER TO ADVANCED



COUNSELLOR/CLIENT **EVALUATION**
AND
RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

COUNSELLOR/CLIENT **EVALUATION** AND **RELATIONSHIP** ENDINGS

"Not every end is a goal. The end of a melody is not the melodies goal, and yet if a melody has not reached its end, it has not reached its goal. Endings are but a parable." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

It's almost a paradox, but the goal of any successful counselling relationship is that the relationship eventually, comes to a successful end! Sometimes therapists and clients build a rewarding relationship, and it may be difficult for both to formalise the end of that bond, but it is a vital step to mark the success of the process and move forward efficiently.

Throughout this article, we will explore how a client-counsellor relationship can end. Endings such as these usually fall into one of two categories: planned or unplanned.

UNPLANNED COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

Either the client or a counsellor might initiate the end of a counselling relationship at any given time. Client-initiated endings can occur as a result of:

- 1.** The client's unwillingness to continue with counselling.
- 2.** An adverse event that renders the client unavailable for counselling.
- 3.** The client behaving in an inappropriate manner that is incompatible with a counsellors standards and preferences.

Client-initiated endings can leave both the counsellor and client with residual feelings of rejection, relief, anger or even shame due to the lack of discussion around the decision which brought the relationship to an end. In short, most of us need to experience closure in our relationships when they end.

Unplanned counsellor-initiated endings can occur as a result of:

- 1.** An event which renders the counsellor unavailable for service.
- 2.** The counsellor experiences a reaction to the client which he/she hasn't yet developed the competencies to manage.
- 3.** The counsellor's refusal to continue working with a client.

Similar emotional reactions to those that occur from client-initiated unplanned endings can occur in response to counsellor-initiated unexpected ends, mainly if the ending is abrupt.

It is good practice for counsellor-initiated endings, even when unplanned, to accommodate a final session to allow for discussion around the reasons for bringing a counselling relationship to a close.

"There is no real ending to a relationship. Not really. It's just the place where we stop a story from going any further." - Frank Herbert



COUNSELLOR/CLIENT EVALUATION AND RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

PLANNED COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

Planned counselling relationship endings can happen as a result of two different outcomes:

1. The unsuccessful achievement of initial counselling goals,
2. The successful completion of initial counselling goals.

Planned counselling endings with unsuccessful outcomes can happen when:

1. The counsellor or client is dissatisfied with the health of the counselling relationship.
2. The client chooses not to progress or make changes, despite the counsellors best efforts.
3. The counsellor has not yet developed the competencies required to meet the specific needs of the client.
4. The client doesn't comply with the contracted requirements (i.e. fails to make payment, adhere to agreed session times etc.)

In their book, Practice Behaviours Workbook, Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen (2006) suggest that in situations like these, the counsellor should discuss with their clients:

- A. what factors prevented a more helpful result from being achieved, and;
- B. the client's attitude about seeking further help in the future.

Discussions like these need to occur in an environment where the three core conditions of the person-centred approach are still being practised (unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence). Additionally, the counsellor needs to make sure that they do not react inappropriately in defence of either themselves or the service they provide. Behaving like will only serve to distance a client, and initiate a missed opportunity for receiving honest feedback.

PLANNED COUNSELLING ENDINGS WITH SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

Every counselling relationship aims to help a client achieve the goals that were established in the planning and contracting stage (Phase 1 of the Gerard Egan's three-phase model). The achievement of these goals might not always signal that a client won't need further counselling support in the future, but it does demonstrate that at this moment, the client can function well on his or her own.

In situations of planned counselling endings (with successful outcomes), it may be beneficial that a counsellor and client discuss a future contingency plan should future assistance be required (i.e. arrange a 'catch up' session in 3-4 weeks time). Additionally, successful outcomes might mark a client's readiness for further self-development and growth, thus, recommendations of possible 'next steps' that would foster this might be appropriate.



COUNSELLOR/CLIENT **EVALUATION** AND **RELATIONSHIP** ENDINGS

EVALUATING AND CONSOLIDATING GAINS (OR GROWTH)

Part of an efficient counselling ending phase involves empowering clients to consolidate the changes they have made. There are numerous reasons why some clients might find it challenging to sustain change over time, including factors, such as the natural tendency many people have to revert to habitual patterns of behaviour and difficulty some people have to resist peer pressure.

To sustain change over a prolonged period, some clients will need to become equipped with a compelling vision for their future, or, a range of coping skills that will allow them to continue growing. Counsellors can assist clients in consolidating their gains by:

Pre-empting any factors that are likely to impact a client's willingness to remain changed can also be discussed in the counselling relationship endings phase. This might include carrying out roleplay discussions with peers or family members who a client envisages might not be too supportive of the changes that have occurred in them.

Implementing monitoring (or a 'weaning') phase, where the frequency of counselling sessions gradually decreases over a period (2-3 months) can be helpful for many clients.

Informing clients that they are more than welcome to return for help if it is required can set many at ease that they are not necessarily 'on their own' just because the counselling relationship has concluded. Remain aware, that there is a 'fine line' to tread between expressing your continued support and conveying a lack of confidence in your client's ability to manage life on their own.

FOLLOW UP SESSIONS

Follow up sessions can often be a useful component of effective counselling endings. The purposes of follow up sessions are five-fold:

- 1.** To provide an opportunity for the counsellor to acknowledge the progress that the client has made since the final, formal session.
- 2.** To allow the counsellor to offer further assistance and guidance in response to any residual difficulties the client might have.
- 3.** Follow up sessions can lessen the impact of a relationship ending.
- 4.** To provide opportunity for an evaluation of the counselling relationship.
- 5.** Follow up sessions can initiate further progress towards the client becoming more sustained on their 'own two feet'.



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ASKING FOR CLIENT FEEDBACK/ FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Here's a list of ten feedback based questions to ask your counselling client(s). Choose the ones that seem 'most appropriate' to you and ask your client/s them before drawing your counselling relationship to a close. Another way to ask these questions is by creating a document which you send by post or email to your client/s.

- 1.** What was the most significant benefit you've gained from our sessions together? (This question will help you to understand what you are doing well - sometimes you'll be surprised by the answer!)
- 2.** What would you like to see more of if you were to work with me again? (This question will help you to discover what the client feels was missing from the service you delivered.)
- 3.** How could I improve my service to other clients? (Some clients will have ideas that you'll find easy to implement which you haven't even considered.)
- 4.** Is there anything you would like me to stop doing in my counselling sessions? (This question gives the client the opportunity to tell you about something that hasn't been useful to him or her.)
- 5.** Is there anything you didn't get from our time together that you hoped you would? (Here's an opportunity for the client to tell you other services that you could provide in the future. If you want to expand or improve your practice, this question is crucial.)
- 6.** Have I treated you with care, attention, and courteousness? (This would be a good question to ask by email or letter. Clients don't always complain about their experience face to face, but can sometimes do if they know they don't have to see you again.)
- 7.** Is there an issue that I haven't spent enough time on with you? (Sometimes clients allow us to move forward when they are still reflecting upon another issue that hasn't yet been resolved. This kind of question helps them to revisit areas they may not have fully understood.)
- 8.** Am I being the person you need me to be right now? (Most of the time we will be doing what a client needs, even if we're not what the client wants. It is good to check once in a while to ensure we're giving the client what they want.)
- 9.** Where have I not been effective in addressing your concerns? (It may be that a client has expected more than what you have delivered. Asking this question might uncover a need for more sessions.)
- 10.** Is our billing clear? Have you got value for your money in our sessions together? (Session fees can sometimes be a source of anxiety for a client. He/she needs to know precisely what he/she is being charged for. Does your bill show that? This final value question is critical to ensuring your client is satisfied with your product or service.)



COUNSELLOR/CLIENT **EVALUATION** AND **RELATIONSHIP** ENDINGS

Yes, we all naturally want to hear positive remarks about what we're doing well as practitioners, but we get the chance to learn and grow when we are shown how we can improve. In times like these, a counselling practitioner does well to listen carefully and take note of constructive feedback that can positively inform future practice.

NOTES

REFERENCES

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